

March 8, 2025

Chairman Young, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Members Miller and Piccolantonio, and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify in writing and express my opposition to Senate Bill 1. My name is Rebecca Hale. I am an Ohio native and current staff member and educator at the University of Cincinnati. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 1, and I write this testimony as a private citizen. The views I express in this testimony are my own, as an individual, and do not represent or reflect the views of the University of Cincinnati.

The extensive changes to Ohio's higher education institutions that the Enact Advance Ohio Higher Education Act proposes would be severely detrimental to Ohio's economic and academic competitiveness, its higher education retention and graduation outcomes, ability to attract and retain expert faculty, and would harm students and staff, and weaken Ohio's reputation within our nation and our world. I have been reflecting on the danger posed by Senate Bill 1 to intellectual diversity, academic freedom, critical thinking, equitable and inclusive higher education retention practices, and Ohio's economy. My reflections herein focus on the past, present and future, through my lens as a Cincinnati.

If Ohio rejects its history as indigenous land (of the Osage, Miami, Shawnee, Ottawa, among other sovereign tribes) claimed by European colonists and transformed into a place of refuge and enterprise for freed African slaves, immigrants and refugees, including large populations of Jewish, Irish, German and Hispanic/Latinx immigrants, as the home of the Serpent Mound, as the birthplace of American reform Judaism and home to the groundbreaking National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and the Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center, and if Ohio rejects the diverse needs of its present populations through Senate Bill 1, cutting off academicians' freedom to teach students about our shared history and present, discouraging expert faculty from teaching at Ohio's universities, creating a culture of fear and surveillance around "controversial" topics, cutting off historically underrepresented and underresourced student populations from resources, programs, support services and scholarships that help to close systemic equity gaps and more thoroughly elevate our economy and generate intergenerational wealth, Ohio will effectively reject its future. By this, I mean that Ohio will reject a future of economic prosperity, and shun the collaborative problem-solving, innovation, academic excellence and talent retention that is necessary to boost the success of **all** population groups in our beloved state.

Ohio's future requires ALL of us. Senate Bill 1 taking away so many places at the table, through the dismantlement of DEI initiatives in Ohio's higher education system, will prevent students, staff and faculty from making Ohio a prosperous place for all of us to live in and a desired destination for

Americans and immigrants who seek to live in a place of intellectual diversity, proactive problem-solving, freedom of speech, and collaborative future-building. From my perspective as a private citizen who has taught, advised and coached college students in Ohio for a decade, I believe that if we value critical thinking as a tool for uplifting Ohio, our country, and the world, then we need to ensure that students can apply this skill to a variety of diverse perspectives, across the political spectrum, through their educational experience, and trust them to use it to our collective advantage.

In my current role, I serve as an educator supporting international and immigrant students who, despite the odds, choose to make Ohio their home and contribute to our academic and economic growth. I have learned through the groundbreaking research of Cincinnati Compass about the economic impact of immigrants and refugees in our Cincinnati region alone: \$320M in contributions to Social Security and Medicare, \$4.1B total household income, \$2.9B total spending power, and \$385M in state and income taxes paid. Of these refugees and immigrants, 48.4% have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 47% have become naturalized and become US citizens. Through the attraction and retention of international and immigrant students and faculty, Ohio, which is already home to 293,000 naturalized citizens, has an incredible opportunity to increase its economic competitiveness and strengthen its position as a hub of local and global talent. Global grows local, and progress takes all of us. In the wake of Senate Bill 1's approval by the Ohio Senate, I have seen projected enrollment of international students decline steeply, as more and more students are questioning whether Ohio is a valuable option for pursuing their higher education. On a day to day basis, I see students from underresourced and underrepresented backgrounds struggle with feelings of being unwanted by Ohio, through a bait and switch plot twist that suggests that Ohio doesn't even want their tuition dollars anymore, much less their academic and professional success that can spread ripples of prosperity throughout our economy.

Senate Bill 1, in its current form, unfortunately does not promote intellectual diversity or the enhancement of Ohio's higher education institutions. It proposes instead to control and censor an environment that has always operated within the fruitfulness of academic freedom and civil discourse. In addition, Senate Bill 1 threatens fair labor practices and free speech, and omits the necessary clarity for guidelines and definitions that would ensure transparency, fairness and justice in our higher education system. If passed in its current form, Senate Bill 1 would have a devastating economic and human impact on Ohio.

I sincerely urge you to vote NO on SB1 and instead support policies that will empower **all** students, faculty and staff in Ohio to thrive and carry our beloved state into a prosperous future of democracy and freedom.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

Kind regards,

Rebecca Hale, M.Ed.